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## Frequently Asked Questions

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- **Is it safe to eat fish from the Galveston Bay estuary?**

It is safe to eat fish from most areas of the estuary. The only areas for which TDH has issued consumption advisories are parts of Upper Galveston Bay, the Houston Ship Channel, and the San Jacinto River. TDH advises that people limit consumption of catfish and blue crabs from areas between Five Mile Pass in Upper Galveston Bay and the Lynchburg Ferry Crossing in the Houston Ship Channel. TDH also recommends limiting consumption of all fish and blue crabs from the Houston Ship Channel upstream of the Lynchburg Ferry and from the San Jacinto River downstream of Highway 90.

- **Why are there two advisories for the Houston Ship Channel?**

The first advisory ([ADV-3](#)) was issued in 1990 after TDH found elevated levels of [dioxins](#) in catfish and blue crabs collected from portions of the Houston Ship Channel, the San Jacinto River, and Upper Galveston Bay. The second advisory ([ADV-20](#)) was issued in September 2001 when TDH found additional chemicals of concern, primarily pesticides and [PCBs](#), in the Houston Ship Channel upstream of Lynchburg Ferry and in the San Jacinto River below Highway 90.

- **Why is TDH rescinding the advisory issued for Clear Creek in 1993?**

Additional testing has shown that levels of contaminants in finfish and crabs from Clear Creek have declined. Eating seafood from Clear Creek is no longer a health risk.

- **What species of fish/how may fish have been tested for contaminants from the Galveston Bay estuary?**

Approximately 500 samples of blue crabs and several species of finfish of legal size, both predators and bottom-feeding fish, have been analyzed from many areas of the Galveston Bay Estuary. To see the specific sites where these species were collected, refer to the ["Seafood Samples Collected per Area"](#) map.

Species and number of saltwater fish collected:

Red Drum (25), Black Drum (40), Atlantic Croaker (10), Southern Flounder (45), Gafftop Catfish (4), Sheepshead (45), Spotted Sea Trout (45), Sand Sea Trout (2), and Blue Crab (77 composite samples).

Species and number of freshwater fish collected:

Alligator Gar (1), Hybrid Striped Bass (9), Striped Bass (1), Freshwater Drum (1), Channel Catfish (2), Blue Catfish (6), Smallmouth Buffalo (24), Common Carp (5), and White Crappie (3).

- **Which contaminants were the fish and crab samples tested for?**

Fish and blue crabs were analyzed for a variety of heavy metals, [organochlorine pesticides](#), polychlorinated biphenyls, and volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds, about 200 compounds in all.

- **Which chemicals were found in the Houston Ship Channel advisory area?**

[Organochlorine pesticides](#) and [polychlorinated biphenyls \(PCBs\)](#) were found in concentrations that prompted the issuing of [ADV-20](#). Elevated levels of dioxins in blue crabs and catfish species prompted the issuing of [ADV-3](#).

- **What are dioxins, organochlorine pesticides and PCBs?**

Dioxins are by-products of many industrial processes, including the production of bleached paper. PCBs are commercially produced chemicals that were once used primarily in the manufacturing of

capacitors and transformers. Organochlorine pesticides are a diverse group of pesticides, several of which have been phased out of use or banned in the 1970's and 1980's.

- **How can these chemicals affect my health?**

Dioxins are classified as probable human carcinogens and can also cause a type of dermatitis in humans. PCBs are probable human carcinogens and may cause several other health problems when ingested in toxic amounts, including reproductive and developmental effects, suppression of the immune system, and damage to the stomach, thyroid and kidney. Some organochlorine pesticides may increase the risk of liver cancer, or damage the nervous system and digestive system.

- **How did these contaminants get into the Houston Ship Channel?**

Multiple sources are possible, including point sources, such as municipal and industrial discharges; non- point sources, such as urban and agricultural runoff; accidental spills; illegal dumping of chemicals; atmospheric deposition of airborne pollutants; and naturally occurring events.

- **How did these chemicals get into the fish?**

Small aquatic plants and animals (invertebrates or larvae) absorb these chemicals from the sediment or water. Small fish that feed on these small plants and animals ingest and store some of these contaminants in their tissue. Larger fish eat these smaller fish, as well as plants and invertebrates, ingesting the contaminants that were stored in the tissues of the smaller fish.

- **What does “limited consumption” mean? How much can I safely eat?**

TDH recommends that adults (pregnant women, nursing mothers, or women who may become pregnant, see next question) eat no more than one eight-ounce meal per week of the specified species for each advisory area in the Houston Ship Channel.

- **Is it safe for pregnant women and children to eat fish and blue**

### **crabs from the Houston Ship Channel advisory areas?**

TDH advises that women who are pregnant or nursing, women who may become pregnant, and children should not consume any of the species included in these advisories.

- **Should I stop eating fish from the advisory areas?**

Very little risk exists from eating a few fish meals from any area of concern. Risk increases for those eating fish frequently over a long period of time from an area of concern.

- **I have been eating these fish all my life. Will I have adverse health effects?**

Not necessarily. Adverse health affects may not occur if contaminants in seafood exceed TDH standards, due to multiple safety margins built into those standards. Eating more than the recommended amount of seafood does not mean that a person will definitely have adverse health effects, but it does mean that it is possible.

- **Will certain ways of cooking or cleaning fish from the Houston Ship Channel advisory reduce the contaminant levels and make the fish safer to eat?**

Yes. Removing skin and fat from fish greatly reduces risk of exposure to environmentally persistent pesticides and organic chemicals. PCBs and many pesticides are concentrated in the fatty tissues of fish. TDH recommends trimming the skin and fatty portions of the fish before cooking, and baking or broiling fish so that excess fat can drip away.

- **Is it safe to eat oysters or shrimp from waters where there are advisories or closures on fish and crab consumption?**

Unless a species is listed in the consumption advisory for a particular water body, you may assume that it is safe to eat. However, to minimize exposure to any given contaminant, TDH recommends consuming a variety of species from a variety of water bodies.

- **Will additional samples be collected and analyzed from the**

### **advisory areas?**

Additional samples will be collected as funds become available and the advisories may be modified if the data indicate a change is appropriate.

- **Where can I find information about other advisories and closures for Texas waters?**

You can contact the Seafood Safety Division at 512-719-0215 or visit their website at <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/bfds/ssd/>.